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SOLDIERS AND MONEY IN EARLY SIXTH-CENTURY HERMOPOLIS

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Papers of a military family who lived in Hermopolis in the sixth century ended up in London around 1900, and have been published at intervals since then. The bulk made its first public appearance in P.Lond. III; some additional acquisitions were included in P.Lond. V. Several of the items in P.Lond. III only received short descriptions, and were fully published piecemeal only much later, in the 1980s and 1990s.¹ One other *descriptum*² is edited below; it is one of the earliest texts in this archive.

P.Lond. III 1021 is a short and complete account, but in spite of its brevity it throws up several problems, such as its date and the background and nature of the entries. Silvanus son of Phoebammon and his sons appear in the heading, and they or rather their account is associated with an *optio*, which indicates that the context is military, and an indiction. This is followed by a reference to the surplus of the previous indiction, perhaps the closing balance of the account held by the *optio*. An entry for a payment made by a *zygostates* through an intermediary closes the text.

Why the sons are mentioned, I cannot tell. If the text dates from 502/3, they would have been very young at that time. Were they seen as future soldiers? Did soldiers receive an allowance for their male offspring? From P.Lond. III 1013 = SB XVIII 13584, now augmented by a fragment in Basel,³ we know that the sons of Silvanus were Georgius, Petrus, and Phoebammon; two of them were Flavii (Georgius in P.Lond. III 1001 and V 1766; Petrus in P.Bas.inv. 42 + SB XVIII 13584 and SB XX 14457), which may suggest that they followed in the footsteps of their father and became soldiers.⁴ But I am not aware of any evidence about special provisions for the sons of soldiers.⁵

P.Lond. inv. 1021

13.6 (w) × 14.6 (h) cm

502/3?

χμγ
 † λόγ(ο)ς Σιλβανοῦ Φοι(βάμμωνος) ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς
 μετὰ Ἀσκληπιάδου ὀπτ(ίω)νος ἰα ἰνδικ(τίω)νος
 πλείου(ς) ι// ἰνδικ(τίω)νος δ΄·
 5 π(α)ρὰ Μαθεία ζυγ(ο)στάτου δ(ι)ὰ Παπν(ου)θίου Βίκ(τω)ρος
 νο(μι)μάτια β π(α)ρὰ ἰ.

1 υἱοῖς 2 λογ, φωτ 3 οπττ 3, 4 ἰνδικς 4 πλειοτ̄ ι corr. from θ 5 π, ζυγςδπαπνςβικς 6 ἰ, π/

‘643. Account of Silvanus son of Phoebammon with his sons, with Asclepiades, *optio*, indiction 11, surplus of indiction 10, 4½; from Mathias, weighmaster, through Papnuthius son of Victor, 2 solidi minus 10.’

- 2 ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς. See above, introd. We find a father and his sons in P.Herm. 70, a receipt issued by an *optio* to an *actuarius* for two payments, one of them δ(ι)ὰ Φοι(βάμμωνος) Κολλούθου Προουτως κα[ῖ] τῶν υἱῶν (l. 2). The editor states that the payments were made ‘on behalf’ of them, but this applies to ὑπ(ὲρ) τῶν ἀπαιτητῶν in the next line, while διὰ is normally used for payers or intermediaries; still, it does not seem that father and

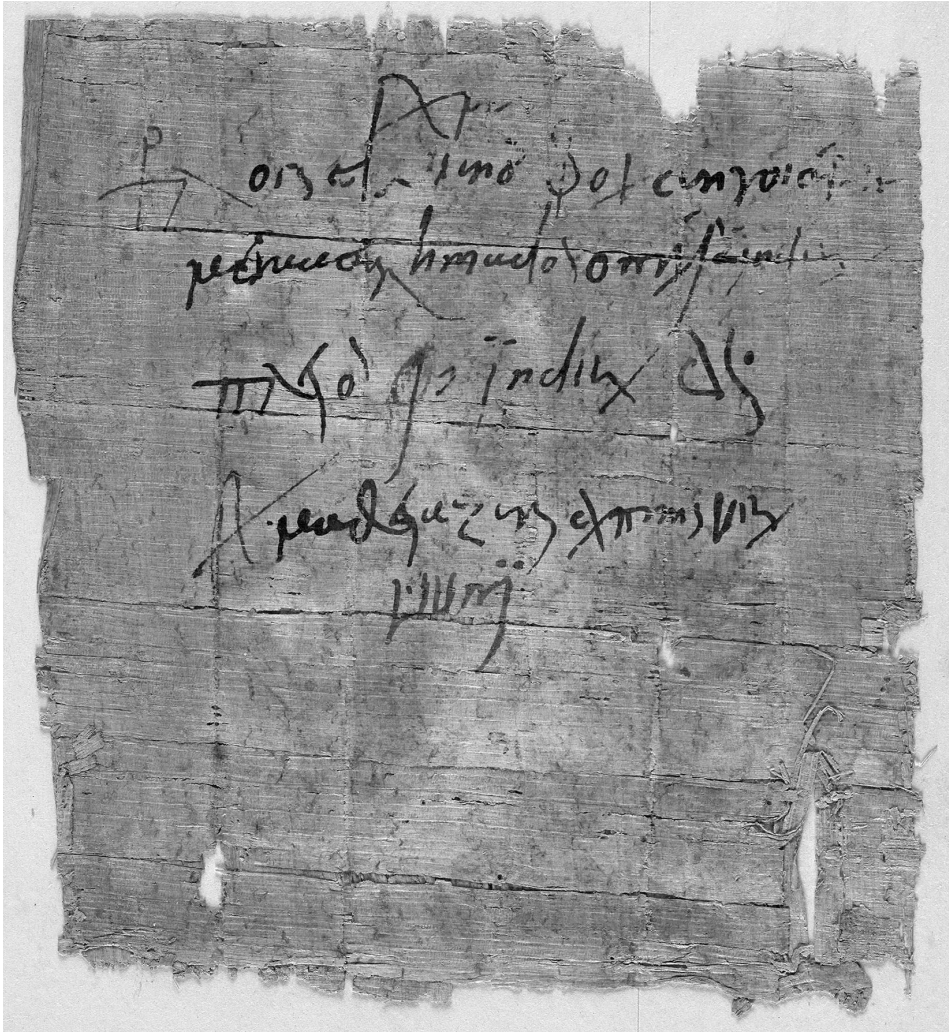
¹ For discussion and references, see J. G. Keenan, *Pap. Congr. XX* (1994) 449–50; N. Kruit, *Tyche* 9 (1994) 82–3 n. 65; A. Papaconstantinou, *Tyche* 9 (1994) 95 n. 10; J. Hengstl, *JJP* 28 (1998) 232. The family is further discussed in a paper by Isabelle Marthot, to whom I am grateful for a preview.

² Described in P.Lond. III, p. liii: ‘Short account presented by Silvanus, son of Phoebammon, for the tenth indiction. 6th cent. Perfect; in a rather thick cursive hand.’

³ A draft of the edition, forthcoming in P.Bas. II, was kindly supplied by I. Marthot.

⁴ In P.Lond. III 1001.6f. (539) Φλαουίω Γεωργίω Σιλ[β]ανοῦ | ἀπὸ στρατιωτῶν, the former soldier could have been either Georgius or Silvanus. Silvanus is called ἀπὸ στρατιωτῶν in SB XVI 12488.4 (538) and XX 14457.1 (541/2?), but Flavii with the same designation occur in P.Berl.Möller 3.7 (540) and apparently P.Stras. V 398.26 (553), both Hermopolite.

⁵ My thanks to Bernhard Palme for a useful if inconclusive exchange of ideas on this subject.



P. Lond. inv. 1021 – © The British Library Board

sons were the beneficiaries. Another son is mentioned in P.Herm. 75, but the context is different: an *optio* made a payment to an *ex-primicerius* for the transport charge of a ship used by his son for his ἀγραρία; the father was not an active soldier but the son was surely one.

- 3 μετὰ Ἀσκληπιάδου ὀπτι(ῶνος). I link this phrase with λόγ(ος), assuming that Asclepiades administered the account, but I am not aware of a parallel.

Asclepiades is not known otherwise. In the group published in P.Herm., Ioannes is attested as *optio* in indiction 10 (P.Herm. 70), and Theodosius in indiction 12 (P.Herm. 39). It may be a mere coincidence that Herminus, *optio* in 500 (P.Herm. 70; see below), is the son of Asclepiades. On the function of *optio*, see B. Palme, CPR XXIV p. 14 and n. 9 with references.

- 4 δ : carats rather than solidi; 4½ sol. would have been a substantial surplus.

- 5 Μαθεία ζυγ(οστάτου). I have assumed that the genitive is meant (l. Μαθείου). Mathias occurs with the *actuaribus* Herminus in SB XXIV 16279 of 501 (see further below), and possibly also a year earlier, when Herminus was *optio*: in P.Herm. 79.5 (500), ed. pr. had Φλαουίῳ Ἐρμίνῳ Ἀσκληπι[άδου] διὰ . . . Ἀμαθίου, later changed to Ἀσκληπι[άδου] . . . μαθίου (BL XII 89). On the function of *zygostates*, see M. De Groote, *BASP* 39 (2002) 27–40; F. Carlà, *Loro nella tarda antichità* (2009) 196–205; N. Borek, “Specialized Personnel”. *The Zygostates, the Solidus, and Monetary Technology in the Later Roman Empire* (MA thesis, Queen’s Univ. 2015). Βίκ(τωρος). βικ(αρίου) may also be considered, but seems less likely.

The earliest securely dated occurrence of Silvanus in a papyrus comes from P.Lond. III 992 of 507. Monetary and prosopographical considerations suggest that the 11th indiction in P.Lond. 1021 corresponds to 502/3 or 517/18, with the former being better supported by the evidence.

The sum mentioned at the end of the account, 2 solidi minus 10 (carats), reflects a rate of minus 5 carats per solidus. Hermopolite documents from this period attest the following rates:⁶

<i>text</i>	<i>date</i>	<i>minus carats</i>
P.Münch. III 102	455	-1
BGU XII 2146	457	-1 ⁷
BGU XII 2150	472	-1.5
BGU XII 2151	476	-2
BGU XVII 2675	481	-3
BGU XIX 2804	488 ⁸	-3
BGU XII 2162	491	-3 ⁹
CPR VII 40	492	-2.5
SB XXIV 15969	491-518	-4
SB XVI 12378	504	-5
CPR VII 43	513	-5
P.Jena II 17	515 ¹⁰	-6
CPR XIX 10	522 ¹¹	-6 ¹²

The published evidence from 504 onwards uniformly presents a rate of deduction that never falls below 'minus 5'. The rate of minus 5 in P.Lond. 1021 is attested between 504 and 513; would this tip the balance in favour of 502/3? On a similar basis, P.Lond. III 1052a = SB XX 14465, an account of money paid to 'Silvanus, soldier', was assigned to the period before 504 because it refers to a solidus of minus 4 carats.¹³ Such conclusions are inevitable if we assume a continuous rise with no falls of the rate of deduction, as well as the use of the same rates in all financial transactions made in the same area at the same time. The table above collects data from contracts between private persons; this is a limitation, brought about by the fact that few other financial documents from this region are securely dated to this period. The payments in P.Lond. 1021, however, involve the state.

The *zygostates* Mathias in P.Lond. 1021.5 is also known from SB XXIV 16279, a receipt for pay advanced by Herminus, *actuarius*, to Fl. Menas son of Phoebammon, on Mecheir 14, indiction 9. The editor pointed out that the date would be 8 February 501 if Herminus were to be identified with his namesake

⁶ This table updates the relevant parts in K. Maresch, *Nomisma und Nomismatia* (1994) 159-61 (the list in CPR VII, p. 158, contains much that is hypothetical, and relies on a rigid assumption of linear evolution; cf. J. Gascou, *CÉ* 69 (1994) 182). Also relevant are SB XX 14456, plausibly dated to 506 or 521 (see R. Ast, *ZPE* 157 (2006) 164), which attests solidi of minus 5 carats, paid in a private context; and P.Stras. V 317 (529 or 530) from Antinoopolis, with a rate of min. 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ car.

⁷ The rent in this land lease is 4 solidi minus 4 carats: χρυσῶν ἑ [νομιματίων τε] ἐ[κ]ά[ρ]ων παρ[ὸ]ν κεράτια τέσσαρα (ll. 12-13; [νομι] [ματίων - - -] ἐ[. . .] παρ[ὸ]ν κτλ. ed. pr.); see the image at <http://berlpap.smb.museum/04850>.

⁸ The name of the consul in l. 1 is lost but the text as restored seems secure.

⁹ The passage is fragmentary and has been emended to yield a different rate (BL VIII 53; for a different but wrong approach see BL X 23), but there is no need to alter the text.

¹⁰ The date is likely but not entirely certain; see R. Ast, P.Jena II 17 introd.

¹¹ See BL XIII 79.

¹² This rate remained in use in the 530s and 540s; see SB XXIV 16284 (533), XXII 15322 (535), XVI 12488 (538), P.Xyla 10 (543), P.Lond. III 1319 (544).

¹³ C. Zuckerman, *Du village à l'empire* (2004) 61 n. 18 (= BL XIII 222).

in P.Herm. 79.5 (500),¹⁴ though dates in 486 or 516 ‘might also be possibilities. The low rate of the *παρὰ κεράτια*, car. 1.4 per *sol.* ... may favour a date before 498’; as for Flavius Menas, it was noted that he was ‘possibly one of the *equites Mauri scutarii* stationed at Hermopolis ... or a member of the *militia officialis*’.¹⁵ Menas is no doubt the same as Φλάουϊος Μηνᾶς Φοιβάμμωνος ... ἀναφερόμενος εἰς τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς Ἐρμουπολιτῶν καθιδρυ[μ]ένων γενγ[α]ιοτάτων Μαύρων, in P.Lond. III 1313.9ff. (507). If the identification holds, it will offer an additional argument for dating SB 16279 to 501.

SB 16279 belongs to a group of receipts and orders to pay involving soldiers, mostly published in P.Herm. The texts are dated by month and indiction, but the occurrence of Herminus, one of the protagonists, in P.Herm. 79, which is firmly dated to 500, places this group in the years 498–507.¹⁶ Some of these texts refer to ‘solidi minus *n* carats’:¹⁷

<i>text</i>	<i>officials</i>	<i>indictional date</i>	<i>Julian date</i>	<i>minus carats</i>
P.Herm. 78		Thoth 7, ind. 7	4.ix.498?	–1
P.Herm. 75	Herminus, <i>optio</i>	date lost		–3
BGU XVII 2715	Theodosius, <i>optio</i> ¹⁸	Thoth 2, ind. 9	30.viii.500	–4
SB XXIV 16279	Herminus, <i>actuarius</i>	Mecheir 14, ind. 9	8.ii.501	–1.4
P.Herm. 70	Herminus, <i>actuarius</i> Ioannes, <i>optio</i>	Phaophi 30, ind. 10	27.x.501	–1 –4
P.Herm. 81 + PMisc.inv. I 68b ¹⁹	Ioannes, <i>actuarius</i>	Mesore 7, ind. 12	31.vii.503	–5

Comparison with the table of ‘minus carats’ rates in Hermopolite contracts (above) shows some unexceptional figures, but also some noticeably low rates (–1, –1.4 car.); even if their dates rely on inference, the aberrant texts cannot be assigned to a different indiction cycle. Most remarkable is P.Herm. 70, which records a payment of 8 solidi minus 8 carats (= 1 sol. min. 1 car.) and another of 1 solidus minus 4 carats. Two different rates were concurrently in use, one of them known from contracts of that time, the other close to the rates found in the aberrants of the group.²⁰ Similar discrepancies within a single document are not unparalleled, especially among accounts.²¹ They may be due to the type of transaction involved, the payees, or the beneficiaries, but we ignore the details. Could it be that in private transactions the rate of deduction (the ‘commercial’ rate) was higher than in some of the transactions enacted by agents of the state?²²

¹⁴ Herminus has been identified with the *actuarius* in P.Herm. 70 (BL XI 95) and the *optio* in P.Herm. 75 (BL XII 89). See also the table below.

¹⁵ The quotations come from J. R. Rea, *ZPE* 114 (1996) 163 (n. 1. 2) and 162.

¹⁶ See F. Mitthof, *Annona Militaris* II (2001) 538–42 (table on p. 540, with question marks added to the dates).

¹⁷ Not included in the table is P.Herm. 72 (4.iii.504), which refers to 26 solidi ‘of good weight’ (εὐσταθμῶς) and another 26 solidi minus 4.5 carats, which are aggregated as 52 solidi [minus 4.5 carats]. I suspect the 26 solidi minus 4.5 carats are another aggregate sum, made up by 25 εὐσταθμῶς + 1 solidus minus 4.5 carats.

¹⁸ Identified with Theodosius, *optio*, in P.Herm. 39 (see J. Gascou, *CE* 77 (2002) 331 = BL XII 28; B. Palme, CPR XXIV 4.27 n.), a text dated Phaophi 12, indiction 12 = 10.x.503. A (different?) *optio* of this name occurs in CPR XXIV 4.27, assigned to the first half of the fifth century.

¹⁹ An unpublished fragment in the collection from which P.Herm. came completes the text and gives the date; a new edition is in preparation.

²⁰ It is also remarkable that the sums are aggregated (cf. above, n. 17), the total being 9 solidi minus 12 carats.

²¹ I discuss two such accounts, P.Daris 41 and P.Princ. III 139, in *BASP* 55 (2018) 297–300. There are several other similar examples, e.g. CPR IX 77 (with BL VIII 117) or P.Jena II 21 (–3 and –4 car.).

²² ‘Minus carats’ rates may not always offer a most reliable chronological guide, but are still useful for such purposes. They could be brought to bear on the dates of some Hermopolite tax receipts of this period, for example. Thus the rate of the deduction makes it hard to think that CPR XXIV 7, a receipt for the payment of 1 sol. min. 5 car. for the *annona*, dates from the mid fifth century, when no such deductions are attested. The same holds for BGU XVII 2709, a receipt of 1 sol. min. 3 car. for *annona* and *canonica*, assigned to the same period; dated to indiction 3, this should be not earlier than 496/7. Two other texts of this type may be contemporary: SB XII 10903 (ind. 3, originally assigned to mid sixth century) with 1 sol. min. 3¼, and PSI I 44 (ind. 10) with 1 sol. min. 3½ car.

To return to P.Lond. 1021, the people mentioned in it and the ‘minus carats’ rate seem to favour a date in 502/3, which will make it the earliest text in the archive, though the rate alone will not strictly exclude a date in 517/18. As for SB XX 14465, it may date from the first decade of the sixth century, but could also be slightly later. In 502/3, the sons of Silvanus would have been very young. When the account SB 14465 was written, one of the sons was old enough to write the document in his own hand. This was Petrus, who later wrote and signed the receipt P.Lond. III 1316b = SB XX 14457 on behalf of his father, then an ‘ex-soldier’.²³ The latter text is dated to indiction 5, which may correspond to 541/2 or even 525/6, given that Silvanus and Petrus appear together in P.Bas.inv. 42 + SB XVIII 13584 of 538. If SB 14465 dated from the early 500s, Petrus would have been his father’s amanuensis over two decades or more. There is no proof either way.

The archive consists of the papers of one or more of Silvanus’ descendants, very probably his son Georgius, last attested in 559 (P.Lond. V 1766).²⁴ The early P.Lond. III 992 (507), a *compromissum*, is the kind of document that one would retain for the future, but this hardly applies to short accounts. Still, anything is possible: our finds are the products of chance, which often defies expectations.

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²³ The identification of the hand is due to N. Kruit, *Tyche* 9 (1994) 83 n. 65, and seems secure (I have checked images of the two papyri).

²⁴ It is possible that Georgius is also mentioned in P.Lond. III 1304b.4 Γεωργίου υἱῷ Κυβανοῦ, a legal agreement of 566/7 (a *descriptum*; I have checked a microfilm); but Silvanus is described as ‘of blessed memory’ in P.Lond. V 1766 of 559, and we would expect the same description here. An Aurelius Georgius son of Silvanus is known from P.Lond. V 1872 of 548; cf. also P.Lond. V 1774.5–6 (570) Αὐρηλίου Γεωργίου | [. ο]υ τῷ θαυμασιωτάτῳ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἐρμοῦ[πο]λιτῶν. These could be two different persons or one and the same: Georgius is a Flavius in P.Lond. 1766.